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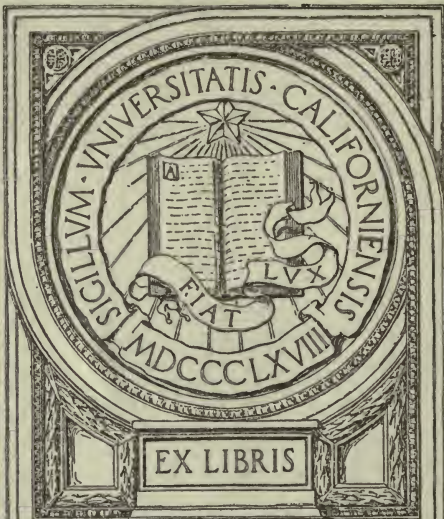


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SOCIALISM

WHAT IS IT?

Is it CHRISTIAN?

SHOULD THE CHURCH TAKE ANY INTEREST IN IT?

— BY —

REV. J. E. SCOTT.

Delivered before the Presbytery of San Francisco

PRINTED BY REQUEST.



SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

1895.

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CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

MATT. 22:39.

THE FIRST QUESTION.

What is SOCIALISM ?

It is a much abused word, often misused, often misunderstood, often feared and maligned without just cause.

It may help to a correct understanding of what it *is*, if we first put away some misconceptions about it and see what it is *not*.

It is not *Anarchy*, nor *Nihilism*. Anarchy is *destructive*, Socialism is *constructive*. Anarchy seeks to disorganize society, Socialism seeks to perfect social organization. The one, in its methods, is the direct antithesis of the other.

Socialism is *not* a scheme advocating an equal division of wealth or property. This absurd and

groundless notion has been the source of much prejudice. It has been often lifted up in the press and in the pulpit as the “folly” of socialism. Logic and sarcasm have been hurled against it; but the “folly” was a man of straw. Even within a few months, from prominent pulpits, I heard this “folly” attacked as though it were a real objection, and in overthrowing it the impression was left that Socialism had been logically vanquished.

In asserting that the equal division of property is no part of a true idea of Socialism, I will not ask you to rely upon my opinion unsubstantiated. A former Austrian Minister of Finance, Prof. Schäffle, in his volume entitled “The Quintessence of Socialism”, says: “It is absolutely false to say that Socialism is the system of periodical redistribution of private possessions. That is absolute nonsense, and every page of a socialistic journal rightly condemns such an account of the matter as the result of gross ignorance.”*

Socialism is *not Communism*. Communism means having all things in common. It abolishes private property and annihilates the distinction between *meum* and *tuum*. This is not the idea of Socialism. Again Socialism does not aim at the impossible end of banishing the natural inequalities found among men. It has no affinity with any form of violence or confiscation or class selfishness. The name has sometimes been brought into disrepute by being associated with

* Pages 30-31.

wild and extravagant schemes and wild and extravagant men, but it *belongs* to nobler purposes and is rightfully claimed for higher ends.

These are some of the things that Socialism *is not*. Let us now turn to the positive side and try briefly to ascertain what it *is*.

WHAT SOCIALISM IS.

Socialism has primarily to do with the practical relations of man to man in what pertains to this life. It considers the race, not as a multitude of isolated beings, but as a *social body*, a body having individual members, but members knit together by a common life, common needs, common struggles, common sorrows, common desires and a common *reality of dependence* one upon another. Socialism touches this body of human life and interest mainly upon three sides: the *economic*, the *political* and the *ethical* or moral sides.

On the economic side, Socialism may be defined as a system of *coöperation in the chief productive industries*, combined with an *equitable distribution of the products of industry*.

Its distinctive idea is “distributive justice”, the aim being to distribute the products of labor according to the principles of right and justice. It would distribute work and the rewards of work *justly*.

We are familiar with the idea of coöperation as it exists fragmentarily about us, but socialistic coöper-

ation means more. It involves a different theory of society. The coöperation of to-day is conducted by the union of a few to make up a large atom in a society composed of disconnected and contending atoms. The combined atoms — or company — acting coöperatively, enter like individuals into the warfare of competition, Its aim is individual profit, without regard to what loss or consequences may come to others. Socialistic coöperation is adjusted to that theory of society which regards it as an organic whole, in which all the members work together, in their varied spheres, for the good of all; and the individual finds his profit in the profit of all.

Socialistic coöperation means that all shall take an active part in the necessary operations of life. It means that one class shall not be required to do all the work while another class, because of some accident of birth, or fortune, or fraud, does all the resting and eats all the fruit. It means, Paul's christian doctrine of labor, that if a man *will* not work, he must exercise the privilege of fasting. It means that the conflict between labor and capital shall be peaceably and permanently settled, by making them *one*, joined by the bond of a common interest; and that conflict can never be lastingly settled on any other basis. It means the breaking down of caste and the false assumptions of superiority and greatness, and the substitution for them of the Gospel principle that *he* is great who serves, and the greatest is he who serves best. Socialistic coöperation is illustrated to some

extent by the organization of the Christian Church to accomplish, by combined effort, the work of extending the christian religion and morality. It is illustrated in the common school system, in which society carries on jointly the work of education; in the army and navy for common defense; in the work of the post office, and ere long we trust it will be illustrated by the ownership of the railroads, telegraphs, telephones and mines, and other universal necessities, *by* the people and *for* the people.

We are familiar, too, with the methods, or rather, the *results* of the distribution of the fruits of labor under the existing social order. It is needless to dwell here upon the inequalities of condition, upon the growing wealth and growing want, which so startlingly characterize our day and our economic system.

There are few now who do not assent to the declaration of Rev. R. Heber Newton, in his "Social Studies", that "colossal fortunes are always of doubtful legitimacy, if not of open illegitimacy, and are therefore unnatural. They are the system of private production, a premonition of decay, and call for the scythe."

Whatever else our economic system may have, it has not the element of just distribution, it has not "distributive justice".

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF ALL PHASES.

In its voluminous literature, Socialism appears in many phases; but whether we consider the paternal

Socialism of Owen, the state Socialism of Bismarck, the international Socialism of Karl Marz, the christian Socialism of Maurice, the evolutionary Socialism of the Fabian Essays, or the national Socialism advocated in "Looking Backward", the essential ideas which underly and give vitality to them all are these :

(a) Coöperation, *i. e.* man working with man for a common end, in contrast with man working against man for private gain ;

(b) A just apportionment of the fruits of toil and the common bounties of nature.

IS IT CHRISTIAN ?

My chief purpose, at this time, is to bring the ethical side of the subject into view. In fact every economic question speedily discloses a moral question. CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM is the title of our theme. Is the title justifiable? If it be then it is of emphatic importance to the Church and to the Ministry of the Church of Christ.

Socialism is a word that not only has an economic meaning ; it expresses also the fact of the existence of a momentous movement among men. No one doubts the existence of a "Social Question", a question as wide in its agitation as the race of civilized man, a question full of vitality, instinct with activity and human hope.

It is this question of which a distinguished minister said :

“This movement which is now mounting into a tidal wave of reform or revolution, according as it finds yielding channels or resisting dikes, is the cresting of a billowy agitation, which has been long gathering force in the ‘vasty deep’ of humanity.”

The social question rises from great human needs and human wrongs, and if Socialism is, as is claimed, “applied Christianity”, then Socialism, in its spirit and end, is the *answer* to the social question.

Is Socialism Christian ?

TESTIMONY OF VARIOUS STUDENTS OF THE SUBJECT

In looking for an answer, let us hear in few words, what some of the best writers on and exponents of Socialism have said :

Rev. Dr. Behrends, in his “ Socialism and Christianity ”,* referring to the historic origin of the Socialistic idea, says :

“The ancient (Mosaic) commonwealth was to be a democratic theocracy, a *fraternal community*, under God’s paternal guard and care. Its citizens were not to regard themselves as ‘competitors in an open market’, but as members of a great and loving household ; and in the two underlying principles of their social compact, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the New Testament idea of the kingdom, agrees with that of the ancient commonwealth.”

* Page 28.

Émile de Laveleye, the gifted author of a critical History of Socialism,—a devout Christian—says with emphasis :

“It was from *Judea* that there arose the most persistent protests against inequality and the most ardent aspirations after justice that have ever raised humanity out of the actual into the ideal. It is thence has come the revolution that still moves the world”. — The same author in his “Socialism of To-day”, says: “*Is it not remarkable*”, that *Christian countries* are precisely those which have evolved socialism? What is the reason of that: It is because Socialism has its root in Christianity. In reality Socialism springs from the sentiment of the revolt produced by the sight of the contrast between the existing economical constitution of society and a certain *Christian* ideal of justice and equality. Socialism and Christianity both aspire to so change things that justice shall reign everywhere. If the existing inequality of conditions is *permanent* and *necessary*, then to spread the Gospel, to open schools, to establish a printing press, to extend the suffrage, are so many ways to attack the social order”. In the introduction he says : “Every Christian who understands and earnestly accepts the teaching of his Master, is at *heart* a Socialist; and every Socialist, whatever be his hatred against all religion, bears within himself an unconscious christianity.” — In “Primitive Property” he declares that “If Christianity were taught and understood, conformably to the spirit of its founder, the existing social organization could not last a day”.

JAMES RUSSEL LOWELL, in the N. A. Review, says: "Socialism means in short, the *pratical application* of Christianity to life."

Webb, in his "Socialism in England" enumerates three prominent features of Christianity when he says that on its ethical side Socialism expresses the real recognition of Fraternity, the universal obligation of personal service, and the subordination of individual ends to the common good."

Thomas Kirkup, in his "Inquiry into Socialism", says: "Considered as a principle and theory of social and economic life, Socialism is marked by the entire *harmony* and even identity of its moral spirit with that of Christianity" * Fraternity is one of the precepts of Christianity, but what is the meaning of human brotherhood when the existing arrangements of property are such as to make the word a mockery."

Prof. Graham, of Queen's College, Belfast, in his "Socialism New and Old", says: "The principles of the Gospel and of Socialism are one and the same, and if the Socialists only knew it and made the most of the fact, it would constitute the strongest plank in their platform".

Philips Brooks says: "Men are coming to see that beyond and above this individualism there is something higher, a mutualism. Sometimes it is called Socialism, sometimes communism, applying to this or that plan for attaining the end sought. Don't you see that in this mutualism the world becomes an entirely different thing? This new life, where service is the

universal law is but the coming of the life of God upon Man; the coming into the inlets of our life of the great ocean life that lies beyond."

These quotations might be multiplied, but enough has been given to show that men who have made special study of the subject, agree in the belief that the spirit and aim of Socialism, so far as it reaches into practical life, is radically christian.

We often learn the character of things by comparing or contrasting them with their *opposites*. The opposite of a system morally unchristian must be a system morally christian. The opposite of the system of *coöperation* is *competition*.

Competition is the basal principle of society as it now exists. The tenacity with which men have held to this principle is one of the anomalies of rational life. A more irrational, baneful, destructive, debasing and sinful system could never be concocted by all the powers of darkness combined. Yet God causes even the wrath of men to praise him, and it is true that material good has come in connection with, or it may be in spite of the wickednesses of competition. But because man prospers for a time in the use of iniquitous methods, it does not make iniquitous methods right methods, nor prove that he would not have been more prosperous with right methods.

The old New England home-life on the farm has not yet faded from all our memories. The father and mother and a goodly number of sons and daughters, were a small commonwealth. Together they carried on

the varied industries of the home and farm, embracing what to-day constitutes a dozen distinct branches of labor. The farm was the property of the family. Tho' legally it stood in the name of the father, each member felt a sense of ownership. The instruments of labor belonged to the family. The welfare of each was in the welfare of all. As all prospered, so each one prospered. They had a miniature coöperative state. They were a Socialistic community. They bore each other's burdens. They lived in peace.

Let us change the method of the family life, animate it with the spirit of private enterprise, make it individualistic, *competitive*. What is the result? One of the boys is stronger, shrewder, more unscrupulous than the rest. He can out-work and out-wit the others. He is able to appropriate to himself the lion's share of the profits. There is strife and bitterness. The weaker members are driven to the wall. They must work for wages or starve. In due time, the old people, unable to work, become subjects of charity or wend their way to the poor-house, *for* competition knows no mercy, it admits of no sense of brotherhood or kinship. Its mottoes are "Business is business" and "Every man for himself."

I need not stop to ask which method in the family is christian. "Waste, antagonism, injustice, oppression, these are the synonyms of competition; waste, antagonism, injustice, oppression, the synonyms of wickedness too." Competition is wrong, because it "develops servility, hatred, untruthfulness, cunning, trickery, pride, oppression, everything but brotherly love." "It

gives activity and growth to all that is hard, combative, unscrupulous and unsympathetic in man, and hinders the development of helpfulness, truthfulness and public spirit. Its tendency is to undo all that religion, ethics and law are trying to do for the ennoblement of mankind." It is the mother of monopoly, the breeder of plutocracies. In spirit, it is divisive and disintegrating. It corrupts governments, engenders revolutions and ends in anarchy. In the words of Prof. Parsons (*Arena*), "competition is the insanity of the past and the colossal crime of the present."

To all this the spirit of coöperation is antipodal. Under a true Socialistic order, the text: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" conveys a significance of possible realization. But *how* can one love his neighbor as himself, when he must fight with that neighbor for bread and butter? As Washington Gladden says ("Tools and the Man"): "The principle of competition is the law of the survival of the fittest; it is the law of plants and brutes, and brutish men, but it is not the highest law of civilized society. That the law of Christ is the law of coöperation seems to me very plain."

HAS THE CHURCH ANY INTEREST IN IT?

We have thus far attempted to set forth the essential elements of Socialism, and to establish the justice of calling it CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM. Let us now turn briefly to some considerations of the subject relating more especially to the church.

Christian Socialism, like Christianity, is emphatically the cause of the poor man. It is the emancipation of labor. It is good tidings, it is the dawn of a new hope and new possibilities to the toilers of every land. That is the reason the common people hear its voice gladly; and that *may be* the reason why not many mighty, not many rulers, not many who dwell in palaces and revel in luxury, hear this call to common service and common brotherhood.

It is sometimes said that the Church has nothing to do with the forms of social organization, that economic conditions are outside of its mission. But the Church can not safely ignore the environments, the material side of the lives of those whom it seeks to renew in character, and to build up into a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The Church is everywhere endeavoring to solve the problem of how to reach the masses. It sees with anxiety the masses, in lengthening processions, going by its doors. Is there nothing in this subject which looks towards a possible, or at least, a partial solution of this problem?

A few years since the United States Senate Committee on Labor and Education invited Rev. Heber Newton to come before it and give his views on the "Labor Question". After reading a paper containing his views, the chairman said to him :

"Men popularly known as leaders in the labor movement and organizations, have been before the committee, and many of them have given testimony to

the effect, that evangelical christianity is rapidly losing its hold upon the masses of wage workers in this country. I would like to know your views, and whether you think that is the fact."

The answer was :

"I fear there is too much truth in this view."

Q. "How do you explain that fact?"

A. "I explain it to my own mind, partly by the intellectual movement of our age, and partly by the social movement of our age, from both which movements the evangelical churches have held back."

Among other things in his reply he said :

"A sense of wrong is a mighty strong eye-wash ; it will clear out a lot of sophisms which blind men's eyes. The well-to-do classes are not quick to see how completely the Christian Church has forgotten its Master's Gospel and become the Church of respectability and wealth and 'society' ; how it has accepted the anti-christian dogmas of the older political economists and in so doing, really turned traitor to the ethics of Jesus Christ. But the working man sees all this quickly enough, his eye-sight, as I said, being sharpened by the sense of wrong. Is it any wonder that he turns away from a church that has no better Gospel than *laissez faire*, no better brotherhood than the selfish strife of competition, no kingdom of God here upon earth, but only one up in the skies ; a Church which baptizes the kingdom of Satan with christian names, and asks the suffering masses of men to accept it as the will of the good Father in heaven ? The only wonder

is that in such an apostacy from its Lord's life and spirit, the church has kept any hold upon the working men".

Is this language too strong? Is it not a fact that the command to love thy neighbor as thyself is not in harmony with the economic conditions in which we live? And yet the Church, as a whole, accepts, endorses and defends these conditions. Can we ever hope to reach the masses until this inconsistency is put away? Well-to-do business men listen with composure and approval to sermons on "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart". That is a lofty theme, high in the spiritual realms of tho't and life. It brings little suggestion of earth or earthly things, but when the second text, which is: "*like unto it,—thy neighbor as thyself*" is taken up, a sense of uneasiness, and weariness steals over the cushioned sanctuary. The preacher himself is often perplexed to know just how to manage the subject. An impression lurks in his mind, and creeps over the pews, that something not designed for much practical obedience, on earth, must have been meant by the text. The feeling is, it may do for heaven where the conditions will be more favorable, but an attempt to put it into actual practice *here* and *now*, would simply take all the life out of business, and make financial success an impossibility.

Is it a wonder that men who work and men who can find no work, the ragged and wretched and hungry multitudes turn away from the church where members call Christ their Savior, but do not believe in the prac-

ticability of the Golden Rule in the world's business and social life? Is it a wonder that not only the poor, but tho'tful people of every grade are asking the question "If the precepts of Christ will not work in business, which makes up so large a part of life, will they work anywhere? If I find it impossible to love my neighbor as myself in my business relations with him, why should I pretend to love him at all?" The economic side of christianity is by no means *all* of christianity; but if men see christianity a failure on the economic side, can they fail to lose confidence in it on all sides?

There are multitudes of unselfish faithful, loyal christian souls in the church. They long and pray for the coming of the kingdom of God's righteousness on earth; and they wonder why it comes so slowly. They want to see souls converted, but they forget that the ears are deaf to other sounds when the stomach is empty. They forget or perchance do not know that against the wheels of the chariot-car of Christ's kingdom the heavy brakes of antagonistic, social and economic environments are set.

To what conclusion then shall we come at the close of a necessarily imperfect consideration of a subject so far-reaching?

From out the night of centuries past, the race has *suddenly*, as it were, awakened to a consciousness of its organic unity. We hear from every quarter of the globe where throngs of thinking, suffering humanity are found, one voice of discontent and protest. With each advance of knowledge and science, the voice has grown

clearer and more articulate, till now it utters no longer a confused jargon of restless muttered anguish and passion, but it speaks as man to man, with a voice of no uncertain sound. That voice declares "that God is no respecter of persons, that in the measuring out of *His* bounty there is no partiality." It proclaims, that *man's inhumanity to man* is the fountain of earth's slaveries and tyrannies, and the woes of want; and *therefore*, for the *means necessary* to life, and the *opportunities* necessary to the pursuit of happiness and higher manhood, it *d demands, not* alms, not pity, but "distributive justice". This demand is the source of Christian Socialism.

To this demand an opposing answer has been made in every age. That answer is in the words: "Am I my brother's keeper?" From Cain's day to the present, in one form or another, the same answer has been repeated. It is voiced by the pride of life, the spirit of caste, the aristocracy of wealth, the competitions of business; and the last official reëutterance of the murderer's question came from the halls of Congress, when, to the appeal of the Industrial Army, for help to help themselves, the answer went; "It is not legal for us to provide means by which our brethren in need may help themselves to bread."

Can the church of Christ longer uphold an economic and social system, that rests on this interrogatory of the first fratricide? Can the church of God continue to pray "Thy kingdom come on earth"—the kingdom of righteousness—when the whole spirit and

foundation of business life is to foster the selfish antagonism of the kingdom of Satan? Do our brethren who tell us the business of the Church is to save souls and not to meddle with social questions, believe what they say? Yes, doubtless; but, fortunately for the Church, they do not follow their own rule. Do they not build church edifices and make them attractive? Do they not try to have good music and to make the social atmosphere of the church inviting? Do they not try to banish saloons and slums? Are not these "social questions"? Are they not attempts to make the environment harmonize with and help on towards the end sought, as Christ did when he drove out the money changers?

The logic of these brethren was the bulwark of American slavery. It will not stand.

Christian Socialism can not be ignored. Every christian should give it a sympathetic hearing, and every teacher of christianity should give it a careful study,—not as sceptics study the Bible to find out what may be said against it,—but to learn what widened application of the Gospel may be in it. Christianity has hitherto been applied to individuals; but it is adapted to a *kingdom*, and a kingdom means organized society and a state.

Surely there is *incentive* to study this subject, in the hope we have of a *redeemed earth*, in the *waning progress* of the present, and the *failures* of the past. For eighteen centuries, thro' good report and evil report, the Church has taught the Gospel of the king-

dom to the children of men. Many saints have been gathered to shine as stars in the heavenly firmament. But if Christ were to come to-day and look upon the children of a common Heavenly Father, with all their *pomp* on one hand, and all their *wretchedness* on the other, would there not be truth of startling reality in the poet's "Parable":

Said Christ our Lord : "I will go and see
How the men, my brethren, believe in me".
He passed not again, thro' the gate of birth,
But made himself known to the children of earth.

Then said the chief priests, and rulers and kings,
"Behold, now, the Giver of all good things ;
Go to, let us welcome with pomp and state
Him who alone is mighty and great."

With carpets of gold the ground they spread,
Wherever the Son of man should tread,
And in palace chambers, lofty and rare,
They lodged him, and served him with kingly fare.

Great organs surged thro' arches dim,
Their jubilant floods in praise of him ;
And in church and palace and judgement hall
He saw his image high over all.

But still, wherever his steps they led,
The Lord in sorrow bent down his head,
And from under the heavy foundation stones,
The Son of Mary heard bitter growns.

And in church and palace and judgement hall
He marked great fissures that rent the wall,
And opened wider and yet more wide
As the living foundation heaved and sighed

“Have ye founded your thrones and altars, then,
On the bodies and souls of living men ?
And think ye that building shall endure,
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor ?

With gates of silver and bars of gold,
You have fenced my sheep from their Father’s fold.
I have heard the dropping of their tears
In heaven these eighteen hundred years.”

“O Lord and Master, not ours the guilt,
We build but as our fathers built ;
Behold thine images, how they stand,
Sovereign and sole thro’ all our land.

“Our task is hard, with sword and flame,
To hold thine earth forever the same,
And with sharp crooks of steel to keep
Still, as thou leftest them, thy sheep.”

Then Christ sought out an artisan,
A low-browed, stunted, haggard man,
And a motherless girl, whose fingers thin,
Pushed from her faintly, want and sin.

These set he in the midst of them,
And as they drew back their garment hem,
For fear of defilement : “Lo, here,” said he,
“The images ye have made of me !”



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